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ABSTRACT

This research report focuses on identifying different phases of organizational mentorship, or examining how mentorship might differ for men and women, and compares informal (spontaneous and unstructured) and formal (organizationally arranged and structured) mentorships. Surveys were mailed to 158 individuals (43 surveys were eventually used) from nine graduating classes (between 1952 and 1989) of Michigan State University. The survey contained several scales to measure mentorship functions, job satisfaction, and organizational socialization. Also, open-ended exploratory questions were employed which required participants to describe the formation of the mentorship as well as the benefits and negative side-effects. Among the study's conclusions were the following: (1) mentors do influence the protege's intrinsic job satisfaction and organizational socialization; (2) the majority of the formal proteges (83%) indicated that the mentors had no choice or that they were unaware of the factors involved in establishing the relationship, the opposite of the informal proteges; and (3) similarity of goals and interests between the protege and mentor was cited by more informal proteges than formal proteges. The study results suggest that, although the benefits for a formal mentorship can be substantial, organizations must allow time for potential mentors and proteges to self-select themselves into a mentorship relationship. Contains 21 references. (GLR)

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INTRODUCTION

Although the history of mentoring can be traced back to ancient Greek times, today, mentoring is a common organizational buzzword used in employee development. A mentorship is defined as an involved working relationship between a senior (mentor) and junior (protege) organizational member. The mentor has experience and power in the organization. From this position, the mentor personally advises, counsels, coaches, and promotes the career of the protege. Advancement of the protege's career may occur directly through hierarchical promotions in the organization or indirectly through the mentor's influence and power over other organizational members.

Most research on mentorships only started in the past ten years. The focus of this research has been on identifying different phases of a mentorship or examining how mentorships might differ for men and women. The benefits of mentorships seem obvious - many top executives attribute much of their career success to a mentor. In addition, a mentor can take satisfaction in personally developing the next generation of executives, and the organization enjoys a smooth transition of operations as senior people pass on their knowledge and expertise to promising proteges. The benefits of a personal coach and mentor seem so convincing that organizations have instituted formal mentorship programs to encourage these relationships and to maximize the benefits (Wilson & Elman, 1990).

But are the relationships from a formal mentorship program equivalent to the traditional mentorship that occurs naturally, without the guidance or management of the organization? This study will compare formal and informal mentorships. The basic distinction between formal and informal mentorships lies in how these relationships are arranged. Informal mentorships are not managed, structured, nor formally recognized by the organization. These relationships occur spontaneously without external constraints from the organization. In contrast, formal mentorships are programs that are arranged, managed, and sanctioned by the organization. These structured programs vary widely in their administration and scope. While informal and formal mentorships can take place simultaneously, the organization may view them quite differently.

PAST RESEARCH

Kram (1983) interviewed managers involved in mentorships and concluded that mentors provide two distinct functions for their proteges. One function is a career function and is directly related to the protege's career advancement. Through the career function, a mentor sponsors and coaches the protege by providing challenging assignments and ensuring the protege receives good exposure and visibility to others. The second function is the psychosocial function and is more concerned with the protege's self-image and competence. Through the psychosocial function, the

mentor is a friend who counsels and confirms the protege's role in the organization.

The importance of the career or psychosocial function in a mentorship may depend on the phase of a particular relationship. Kram (1983) describes four distinct mentorship phases: 1) initiation - the mentorship forms, 2) cultivation - the mentorship flourishes, 3) separation - the mentorship breaks up, and 4) redefinition - the relationship changes. She believed that career functions were most important during the early phases of mentorship while psychosocial functions became more important during the later phases.

The initiation phase can be characterized as the time when the match is made between prospective mentors and proteges. Differences between formal and informal mentorships are likely to be most salient in this initiation phase. Informal mentorships typically grow out of informal friendships. Based on a close friendship, proteges become worthy of the extra attention from a mentor. In informal mentorships, mentors often select proteges who share similar interests and work perspectives.

In contrast, formal mentorships are typically not based on an informal friendship between two organizational members. The formal match between mentor and protege may be made randomly or assigned by a committee. Regardless of the approach, the organization does the matching. In these situations, the mentorship begins without the benefit of an established informal friendship. Thus, formal mentors may not view the protege as particularly worthy of special

attention and additional support. In fact, the assigned mentor may resent having to take time away from work to be involved with someone not of their choosing. A longer introductory period may be needed in formal mentorships to allow the participants time to get to know one another.

Formal and informal mentorships may also differ along motivational dimensions. Informal mentorships arise because of a desire on the part of the mentor to help the younger employee. The protege willingly receives advice and assistance from the senior employee. Formal mentorships, on the other hand, involve a degree of external pressure. The mentor and protege are likely to be required to participate in the mentorship as a function of their positions. Formally mentored partners may react with less motivation to a situation that has been forced upon them. Therefore, the initiation phase becomes a critical point in the mentoring process. The mentor's and protege's handling of their early interactions will not only determine the protege's adjustment to the organization but the protege's eventual career outcomes.

Noe (1988) studied educators in formal mentorships. He found that mentors who thought their proteges were effectively utilizing them were related to protege reports on the psychosocial function. Thus, effective formal mentorships were associated with higher psychosocial support. However, no relationships were found for the career function. Thus, formal mentorships were found to impact only on the psychosocial function.

Riley and Wrench (1985) studied women lawyers in informal mentorships. They classified these women into groups of truly mentored proteges and those that did not conform to a strict definition of mentorship. They found the truly mentored lawyers with significantly higher levels of career success and satisfaction than the group that was not mentored. Thus, informal mentorships were found to impact on the psychosocial and career functions.

Mentoring outcomes continue to be an important issue because of the need to establish a quantifiable case for promoting mentorship programs. Fagenson (1988) proposed that protege power was one outcome of a mentoring relationship. Proteges were expected to gain greater influence on policy decisions, closer relationships with key organizational players, and more control over resources than non-proteges. Using participants from two levels of management within one organization (37% in an informal mentorship), respondents rated their perceived power for influence, access, and control within the organization. Results established a link between perception of power and protege status within the organization.

Other than the last two studies, the outcomes of mentorship have received little empirical attention in the mentoring literature. Empirical support, e.g., collecting quantifiable data, is critical because it is important to know the level or magnitude of the outcomes of mentorships. Our study examined two types of

outcomes: the protege's organizational socialization and the protege's job satisfaction.

Fitting into the organization requires that proteges learn the information necessary to perform their jobs and become functioning members of the organization. Riley and Wrench (1985) have stated that mentors are responsible for teaching their proteges "the ropes" of their profession. During the time that mentors guide their proteges, the mentor is expected to convey the necessary knowledge and information concerning the organizational history, goals, jargon, politics, people and performance (Chao, O'Leary, Walz, Klein, & Gardner, 1990). Acquisition of this knowledge speeds the protege's organizational socialization. If informally mentored proteges receive more support from their mentors than formal proteges, the assumption that informal proteges would be better socialized in the organization can logically be made.

The type of mentorship could also affect job satisfaction. With greater knowledge of the organization, added visibility, and the realization that a mentor (higher status in the organization) can protect a protege's interests, proteges in an informal mentorship may have higher levels of job satisfaction than proteges from formal relationships. For instance, proteges in informal mentorships would report higher levels of intrinsic job satisfaction. Intrinsic job satisfaction captures aspects of work, such as responsibility, autonomy, and feelings of accomplishment. An informally mentored relationship would have more influence on these psychosocial aspects of the job.

For extrinsic job satisfaction, mentors may not be able to enhance directly their proteges' working conditions, pay, or a company policy that affect the proteges. No difference, then, would be found between formal and informal mentorships on extrinsic job satisfaction.

An indirect effect of mentorship type on intrinsic job satisfaction may also exist. Figure 1 depicts how this relationship as it might look. Socialization which is already assumed to be influenced by mentorship type directly impacts job satisfaction. Rapid socialization enables the employee to gain more self-confidence, to feel capable of performing the job better, and to have a better understanding of the organization's history, norms and rules. Knowledgeable individuals are likely to have a positive view of the job and the organization. In turn, this will affect the individuals' intrinsic job satisfaction. Organizational socialization can have a greater impact on intrinsic than extrinsic satisfaction.

Exploratory questions

Several other important questions were addressed in an exploratory fashion. Key individual perceptions underlie the formation of the mentorship. Since informal and formal mentorships differ in the initiation phase, essay questions were used to elicit more details on the protege's perceptions of the events involved in establishing the mentor relationship.

Hunt and Michael (1983) have argued that outcomes can be positive and negative. Open-ended questions on the perceived benefits and negative side-effects from the mentorship were also included. The questions captured mentorship outcomes that could not be easily measured empirically.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were part of a larger study examining the career development of alumni from Michigan State University. Alumni from nine graduation classes were selected to obtain data on individuals who graduated between the years 1952 and 1986. Respondents who returned a survey in the study's first year were contacted to solicit interest in a study of mentoring relationships. As a result, surveys were mailed to 158 individuals. A total of 58 (36.7%) surveys were returned; 43 were usable for testing the predictions.

The sample of protege surveys were divided into two mentorship groups: (1) informal mentorships (n=29); and (2) formal mentorship programs (n=14). Proteges held managerial positions and were employed in a variety of organizations and industries. Ten of the fourteen proteges in formal mentorships were from one organization. The protege sample consisted of 23 males and 19 females, with an average age of 37 years.

Comparisons between formal and informal proteges showed informal proteges reported a mean of 13.6 hours per week with their

mentor and formal proteges reported only 2.9 hours per week. In addition, the mean number of years on the job was 5.1 years for informal proteges and 2.1 years for formal proteges. The differences in number of hours spent with the mentor and job tenure were statistically controlled in the data analyses.

The Survey

The survey contained several scales to measure the mentorship functions, job satisfaction, and organizational socialization. In addition to these standard scales, the exploratory questions were open-ended and required the participants to describe the formation of the mentorship as well as the benefits and negative side-effects.

RESULTS

Given the differences in how formal and informal mentorships are established, we predicted that informal mentorships would be more intense relationships that would result in greater outcomes for the proteges. Specifically, proteges in informal mentorships would report higher levels of psychosocial and career related functions, organizational socialization, and intrinsic job satisfaction than their counterparts in formal mentorship programs.

Average scores for these scales are shown in Table 1. In all cases, the average scores for the informal proteges were higher than those reported by the formal proteges. The difference between these two groups was statistically significant for the career related function, five of the six socialization scales, and the intrinsic satisfaction scale.

Why are informal proteges more intrinsically satisfied with their jobs than formal proteges? To answer that question, we believed the type of mentorship was not as important as the extent to which a mentor helped socialize the protege. In other words, a mentor who helped the protege learn about the job, people, politics, etc. would be more likely to develop a protege who was satisfied with the intangible aspects of the job. Using a series of hierarchical regression analyses, we found statistical support for the argument that a mentor influences the protege's organizational socialization, which in turn, influences that protege's intrinsic job satisfaction. Thus, the relationship is shown as:

Mentor --> Protege's organizational socialization/learning --> Protege's intrinsic job satisfaction

Content Analyses of Exploratory Questions

Content analyses of the open-ended questions examined two general issues. Factors leading to the formation of the mentorship and the perceived outcomes (both positive and negative) of the mentorship were identified and catalogued. The majority of the formal proteges (83%) indicated that the mentor had no choice or that they were unaware of the factors involved in establishing the relationship. Comments from formal proteges articulated this message: "I wasn't chosen, he was forced to work with me and our relationship grew from mutual respect after working with each other." "A pool of potential proteges submitted resumes for review by a matchmaker committee. A reduced number of resumes were then

forwarded for review by potential mentors, and the final selection determined."

In contrast, informal proteges indicated that their mentor had a choice when establishing the relationship. Only 8% of informal proteges were unaware of factors involved in their mentor's choice. The protege's work skills and abilities were most often cited by informal proteges (38%) as the reason for the mentor's choice. These comments were typical of informal proteges' reason for why they were selected: "Research and documented processing system better than peers," and "Hard work, willingness to achieve." In addition, similarity of goals and interests between the protege and mentor was cited by more informal proteges than formal proteges. These comments covered both shared interest in work and nonwork (leisure) activities.

Upon examining comments about outcomes of the mentorships, the most often cited gain was knowledge about the organization and the job. These comments were reported by 81% of the informal proteges but only 43% of the formal proteges. A second outcome concerned protege promotion. Promotion was listed as a mentorship benefit by 17% of the informal proteges but only 8% of the formal proteges. Proteges in both types of mentorships reported no negative side-effects from the relationship.

The results from the content analyses support the differences between formal and informal mentorships during the initiation phase. In addition, the most common outcomes reported from the proteges were examples of the career-related function.

CONCLUSIONS

The results to the study supported differences between formal and informal mentorships. Informal proteges reported receiving more career-related support and had higher levels of organizational socialization and intrinsic job satisfaction. Thus, informal mentorships may be more intense and effective than formal mentorships.

Organizations planning to design formal mentorship programs should note the importance of the relationship's formation during the crucial initiation phase. A well-managed formal mentorship program should allow time for potential mentors and proteges to self-select themselves into a mentorship. Without any input from either party, formal mentorships may be analogous to blind dates - they can work out but the odds are higher if both people like each other before the relationship is established. Unless both parties agree that the relationship will be beneficial to both, the success rate of formal mentorships may be reduced to chance levels.

The potential benefits from a formal mentorship program are substantial. Mentors can be trained to coach proteges without being domineering or overly protective. Proteges may be able to advance their careers and enjoy their work more if the formal mentorship can better mimic aspects of informal mentorships. People who may not be obvious choices for informal mentorships (e.g., women and minorities) may be able to benefit from formal programs. However, the key to a successful mentorship is not whether the relationship is formal or informal, but the extent to

which the mentor truly teaches a protege about all aspects of the job and organization.

Figure 1. Indirect effect of Mentorship type on Intrinsic Job Satisfaction

Table 1

Means of Protege Reports of Mentorship Functions

Mentoring Function	Informal Proteges (n=29)		Formal Proteges (n=14)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
Psychosocial	4.02	.46	3.78	.77	-1.11
Career	3.71	.73	2.12	1.03	-5.18**

** $p < .01$

Table 1 Cont.

Scale Means and Standard Deviations by Type of Mentorship

	Informal Proteges (n=29)		Formal Proteges (n=14)		Univariate $F_{(1,39)}$
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Socialization					
Goals/Values	4.00	.70	3.56	.59	4.34*
Politics	4.25	.53	3.83	.61	6.84**
People	3.92	.41	3.77	.47	1.45
Language	4.44	.57	3.87	.68	9.84**
History	4.32	.54	3.59	.66	13.72**
Performance	4.27	.67	3.73	.56	3.42+
Satisfaction					
Intrinsic	4.18	.59	3.83	.45	2.70+
Extrinsic	3.55	.91	3.27	.57	0.64

+$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

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The Collegiate Employment Research Institute was established by Michigan's Legislature in 1984. The Institute is charged with the task of examining issues on career development and employment for college graduates. Various projects are underway, including the study covered in this report, to provide information to educators and counselors for program development. If you have any questions on this study or any Institute project, please contact the Institute directly.

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